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IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE AN E-JOURNAL: COLLABORATION THROUGH NECESSITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to share the changes that are currently taking place in the University Libraries' Technical Services Division at the University at Albany in managing e-journals. This paper examines how a policy decision to use the single record approach for journals, regardless of format, increased the amount of in-house maintenance for e-journals. The new workload was too large for one person to effectively continue to manage. The leaders of Cataloging and Database Maintenance decided to collaborate and redistribute the e-journals work to staff throughout the two departments. The inclusion of Acquisitions staff, over time, was incorporated into the plan to redistribute the e-journal work. All the participating staff were asked to develop new skills and increase their knowledge of serials and periodicals cataloging and holdings. Although transition is not a circumstance unfamiliar to libraries, staff can become overwhelmed. This paper discusses how planning, communication, collaboration, and feedback have been used to develop a cross departmental approach. This approach was effective in breaking down barriers, helping staff adjust to the resulting changes, and easing the shift to the new workflow.

Introduction

Our library is on a university campus that is one of four university centers in a state system of 64 campuses. Our campus offers 58 undergraduate majors and 61 minors and more than 120 graduate and doctoral programs. According to the most recent Carnegie Classification, the University at Albany is a large research university with over 16,000 students.

A large portion of our budget is state funded. All of the materials for our libraries' collections, including electronic resources, are purchased from the general acquisitions budget and a few special funds. Our budget has not grown over the last few years. Our state support has decreased by about 5% over the last five years. In fact, when you take inflation into account, we have lost more purchasing power than the amount of the reduction.

Over a period of years, we have been moving from a print based collection to an electronic based collection for continuations (periodicals, serials, and standing orders) due to the changes in publishing and our budget. As a result we have cancelled a number of print continuations. Our periodical subscriptions went from 5,182 in 2003 to 4,356 in 2008; a decrease of 826 titles. In July 2003 we had 251 Electronic database subscriptions and 13,975 Electronic full-text serials. By July 2008, we had 279 Electronic database subscriptions and 35,973 Electronic full-text serials.

During this past year when the bibliographers reviewed their continuations to plan for potential cuts, they often asked Acquisitions Services Department staff for advice about

canceled print journal subscriptions where the title is currently included in one of the aggregated databases. Since the aggregators negotiate with the publishers to purchase content for their databases, we explained that we cannot guarantee that any of the journals included in the database will always be included in the database.

We continue to maintain a good balance between continuations and firm orders, although the firm order budget has been cut back as well. As the budget shrinks, the decision about what to purchase is more important since there is less money to spend on materials that may not be used or do not support the curriculum or the research of the students and faculty. Every resource becomes more valuable and it is even more important to make every resource easily accessible.

Changes in cataloging focus & policies

Over the last fourteen years, there were specific events that led us to the current policies concerning the cataloging and management of electronic journals. The Taskforce on Access to Electronic Journals Report (1995) made the assumption that electronic journals (e-journals) would eventually be added to the online catalog. In 1998, the Cataloging Electronic Resources Group wrote a report outlining the rationale for adding electronic resources to the online catalog and the cataloging policies that were to be implemented. In that document, the group stated that we were going to the single record approach when cataloging electronic resources because of the ease of use it provided for the patrons.

In that same year, Cataloging Services began to add large numbers of electronic journals into the ILS, ADVANCE, and discontinued adding items to the print shelf list. In 2002, Cataloging Services made several changes to the processing of e-journals: The catalogers began to add serials summary holdings statements; multiple 856s were added to the holdings records; SFX was implemented in the online catalog, Minerva; 710s were no longer added to the bibliographic record. At the same time, we began a retrospective project to add holdings to titles from Ingenta, Catchword, Ideal, ScienceDirect, Project MUSE and JSTOR. The Systems Department staff provided assistance by writing programs for the Ideal and ScienceDirect titles.

By 2002, we had created a profile in the Serials Solutions knowledge base and started getting Serials Solutions data in the form of a spreadsheet rather than downloads of records on a bi-monthly basis. There were 20 providers/resources and 11,275 journal titles to maintain. The next two years, 2003-2004, saw the implementation of SFX and a migration to a new ILS, ALEPH, by the University Libraries.

Approaches to cataloging e-journals

Libraries currently have several cataloging options to choose from. A library can use the single bibliographic record approach that may include various formats such as print, microform, or electronic versions. The separate record approach creates individual bibliographic records for different formats or instances of a journal. There are very strong opinions about which is the correct approach. There is also a choice to use a mixed record approach. This approach invokes not only strong opinions but causes librarians themselves to be conflicted. The online catalog will have instances of both single and separate bibliographic records in the same online catalog. Reasons for this may include finances, staffing, shared or union catalogs, number of electronic resources, decision to use vendor records and keeping the online catalog current.

There are other possible approaches to electronic journals, including the decision not to add them to the online catalog but to rely on journal finders, A – Z lists and databases for access.

Question posed to the group: What approach are you using? Is anyone besides us using the single record approach? A variety of approaches are used at the libraries where the 6 attendees work. Two used the single record approach. One attendee stated that her library was switching to the single record approach.

Changes in staffing

Within the University Libraries there are three categories of employees: Librarian, Professional and Clerical. In many libraries, Librarians are referred to as Professionals, so our job title lingo can be a bit confusing. The Librarians and Professionals are both considered to be faculty. Throughout the State University of New York system a Professional employee is required to hold a bachelor's degree; not necessarily a library degree. The Clerical employees are members of the civil service bargaining unit. They are required to take competitive exams to qualify for their jobs and to advance to a higher position. Our departments are within the Technical Services and Systems Division.

In the Acquisitions Services Department we currently have 3.5 Professionals and 8 Clerical employees, one clerical vacancy and one student employee. The Database Maintenance, Processing & Bindery (DMPB) Department has 7 full-time employees, 1 vacancy and 8 student employees. The Cataloging Services Department has been organized as a team with a team leader since November 2004. It is staffed by 6.5 employees and 2 student employees. There are two vacancies, including the Head of Cataloging.

Cataloging Services and DMPB Department have undergone numerous organizational and staff changes over the last 10 or so years. The DMPB Department changed several times, alternating between being a separate department and a unit within Cataloging Services. These changes have coincided with changes in leadership within Cataloging Services and the DMPB Department. In 2004, the Cataloging Services Department Head position became vacant and has remained that way. The librarians and the Assistant to the Head of Cataloging proposed the team model with a rotating team leader approach for managing the department to the Libraries' administration. The next critical vacancies in Cataloging Services were two Electronic Resources Librarian positions. At this point in time, the Assistant to the Head of Cataloging was moved out of the department with the DMPB staff to become its own separate department. The members of the cataloging team, including the Head of DMPB, focused a great deal of time and effort on learning and understanding the most effective management of e-journals. It became apparent that the workload of electronic journals could not be maintained by a single individual. The team obtained more powerful software, UltraEdit and UltraCompare, for managing the Serials Solutions data and decided to take advantage of its capabilities to provide more detailed and accurate access to e-journals in the online catalog. Even though Cataloging Services and the DMPB Department had several vacancies, the cataloging team decided that the enhancements to the records would better support the activities of the students and the faculty. E-journals work was distributed by adding it to performance programs and departmental responsibilities. This additional work has grown into an all-consuming responsibility for the DMPB department and now is its primary focus.

As noted, the staff of the library overall has been shrinking over a number of years. The total staff count was 171 in 2003 and fell to 154 in 2008. A loss of 17 positions, almost 10%, in

5 years. Our reliance on student staff has grown over time. Acquisitions and DMPB both depend on student staff to accomplish its work.

The Acquisitions Services Department Head has worked in the Acquisitions Services Department since 1986. Two other members of the department have also worked in the library for over 20 years. Six staff members have worked in the library since the 1990s. Almost all of the staff members started working in the library within the department and have stayed. Some have been promoted to different positions within the department.

The Acquisitions Services Department is a tight knit group. We get along with each other and help each other out. Members of the department firmly know the existing policies and procedures and are experts in their jobs. We stress following written instructions to perform daily tasks. Staff members are comfortable and confident in completing regular work using standard procedures. As a result, everyone responds easily to questions and concerns from outside the department.

In 2004, when the University Libraries migrated from Geac ADVANCE to ALEPH, an ExLibris ILS, we all worked hard to prepare for this change and to adapt to using the new ILS. While there have been steady changes to our work over the years, changing library systems, incorporating new state rules for paying invoices, researching publication information online, placing orders through vendor web sites, many of the jobs have remained basically the same. Since we plan to convert the majority of our print subscriptions to online, some of the work is expected to change or even disappear over the next few years.

Following a retirement several years ago, the promotion of a unit member to the Head of the Periodicals Unit, and the subsequent loss of another position, we took the opportunity to merge the Serials and Periodicals Units into the Serials Services Unit and also established an Electronic Resources Unit. So two units were merged and a new unit devoted to e-resources was created. We needed to reorganize because we recognized that we could, and perhaps should, be doing more with our electronic resources. Three things we wanted to do are a systematic review of all of our online resources in order to verify the current platform, URL and holdings, document the type of access we are entitled to as part of the invoicing process and develop our own procedures for checking-on. At the same time, the number of print resources continued to decrease and the number of print plus online or online only subscriptions continued to increase.

Staff retention is important to the supervisors within the Acquisitions Services Department. When we reorganized we were able to allow a staff member to make a choice about whether to move over to working with electronic resources. Providing opportunities can help retain staff who may look to work somewhere else instead.

Changes in responsibilities & skills

Previously, Cataloging Services dealt with traditional aspect of serials (new titles, cancellations, ceased titles and title changes) and DMPB staff sent materials to the bindery, maintained the Reading Room and added the new bound volumes to the shelf list and later the ILS. DMPB was responsible for coordinating the collection of periodicals to be sent to the commercial bindery from our other libraries.

In the print journal scenario, the catalogers and DMPB staff were responsible for cataloging the periodicals, editing holdings and sending issues to be bound. With the introduction of e-journals, workflow was turned upside down. Journals that were once tangible and, with the exception of the occasional rogue journal, inert were now exploding like bunnies. Each month, the reports would bring news of new titles, deleted titles, holdings changes, URI changes, etc. Our primary focus has shifted from print to electronic. Every job in the DMPB department has been altered by e-journals. Some staff have specific e-journal assignments in their performance programs already. By the end of the year, every performance program in the department will have an e-journal related responsibility added to it. There is a phased plan to include all DMPB staff into the electronic workflow. We have had to reassess our priorities and decide what work we can stop doing to free up more staff time to focus on electronic resources. Staff takes pride in their work and it has been challenging to get them to let go of tasks that they have performed well for many years. A couple years ago, we decided to stop the final check of materials before sending them to Circulation. As expected, a few mistakes were sent back for correction. DMPB staff were upset by the errors because they felt it reflected badly on them. Staff began to re-implement the final review of materials, ignoring their supervisor's instructions.

The management of e-journals has required DMPB staff to learn new and more complex skills. They are required to edit bibliographic and holdings records in the cataloging module, recognize and understand MARC tags and contents, identify good e-journal records in OCLC's Connexion and our online catalog, understand serials cataloging standards and practices, delete titles and holdings, verify working links and identify problems to be reported.

Question posed to the group: Who is taking care of your e-journals? *One of the attendees remarked that clerical staff were working on e-journals. They found the work to be challenging and very different from the work they had done in the past. Attendees asked if we had a similar experience when introducing new and complex tasks to staff. We noted that we had a similar organizational structure and similar experience.*

Changes in skills and technology

Cataloging Services and DMPB Department have seen a drastic shift in the type of materials that we catalog and process. Electronic resources grow at an incredible pace and require continuous attention long after the initial processing. The management of e-journals has required DMPB staff to learn new and more complex skills. The skills required to update a print shelf list and gathering print journal issues for binding are not comparable to those needed to manage e-resources. They are required to edit bibliographic and holdings records in the cataloging module, recognize and understand MARC tags and contents, identify good e-journal records in OCLC's Connexion and our online catalog, understand serials cataloging standards and practices, delete titles and holdings, verify working links and identify problems to be reported.

DMPB staff have been required to learn to be flexible and to adapt to new technologies that have come along. We have gone through several ILS migrations, exchanged typewriters for PCs, different bibliographic utilities, moved from books to desktop and web products, and a variety of word and data processing software. With each transition comes the need for staff to develop more complex skill sets. They are also asked to process a constantly increasing workload and have less time to complete the assignments. The workload of e-journals is constant, with very little breaks between data updates. E-journal maintenance is eternal and relentless.

When we migrated to our current ILS, ALEPH, in 2004, Acquisitions staff were required to learn about and use publication patterns for managing predictive check-in and creating the holdings for print serials. The intricacies of updating publication patterns continue to be challenging and yet staff interpret and identify when a publication pattern needs revision every day. Our ILS also permits exporting reports to Excel and we use this capability regularly. Prior to the migration, we used Excel on a limited basis to keep track of our credit memos. Since 2004, we have used it to record the results of many ILS reports used to manage our budgets and claim open or unfilled orders or missing journal issues.

Traditionally, Acquisitions staff have only worked in the Cataloging Module to edit records for firm orders and update publication patterns. Although we have been required to become familiar with the MARC record because we build our orders on bibliographic records downloaded from OCLC, we have not had traditional cataloging responsibilities.

In 2007, we migrated to the Serials Solution article linker and stopped using SFX. We began receiving monthly Serials Solutions data that we compared from month to month using Microsoft Access. Cataloging Services spent twenty hours bi-monthly comparing the files for new and withdrawn titles for 11 of the resources from the spreadsheets. In the Fall of 2008, we began using the software Ultraedit and Ultracompare to run the comparisons and started to add additional resources to the comparison process as their titles were added to the catalog. The new process now takes 20-25 hours each month but it allows us to perform more detailed comparisons on over 30 resources. There are currently 56,600 unique e-journal titles in the Serials Solutions knowledge base that get reported on each month.

Planning for change

Last spring, a few of us from three separate departments in Technical Services met informally to discuss the possibility of having Acquisitions staff work on the Serials Solutions processing. At that meeting we talked about what we wanted to communicate to the staff about the fact that all of our work will change over time; the expectation that we will all be involved in ordering, monitoring (checking-on), and providing access to e-resources in the near future.

During our initial discussions we asked one of our expert trainers to present information to staff about how research is conducted in the e-resources environment. We sought the approval of our Associate Director to implement our plan. We also proposed that the supervisor of the Serials Services Unit would work on the "Serials Solutions processing" first.

Cataloging Services and the DMPB Department had already developed a collaborative relationship and workflow for e-journals. Bringing in another department meant rethinking the established processes and responsibilities. How would this change the work that staff in Cataloging and DMPB were already doing? How can we help staff take on new roles in a workflow outside of their own department? To help Acquisitions staff transition to their new role outside of their department, they were sent invitations to the meetings for the team called the Enhancers. This provided an opportunity to interact with others doing the same work and to be an active member of the team. Cataloging Services and the DMPB Department decided that the existing workflow worked well and wanted to bring the Acquisitions Services staff into that existing workflow rather than create another separate workflow. Communication of e-journal information was an important issue that the two departments had been trying to improve upon

and this opportunity opened the door for those conversations. The collaboration is still in-progress and we are still working our way through our questions.

Planning is key

In the beginning everyone has their vision for their project. Collaboration is not necessarily an easy process. Successful collaboration requires patience, time, a partnership and the ability to let go of issues that are holding the project back from completion. All the principal players are going to want to contribute to the project and shape it with their own vision. It is important to be flexible. There will be philosophical differences, different management styles, and different decision-making processes. It is important to remember that collaborating is not about being in charge. Things will not happen at the speed to which you are accustomed to working at. It is important not to get in your own way of successful outcome. However, decide ahead of time what issues you can let go of and what outcomes you must have at the end of the project.

We decided to set up short-term projects that provide people with a positive experience and peek into the world of e-resource management. The project was designed with the internal organization in mind. In a hierarchical organization, there may be restrictions on the tasks that can be assigned at various staffing levels. Our focus was to come up with realistic goals and expectations, decide what we wanted as an outcome, selecting a timeframe that worked well with our existing process, deciding how to best reassign our staff to take on the training and still get the e-journals work done without interruption.

When we started to talk about having Acquisitions staff members work on Serials Solutions processing, we all agreed that we were not looking for a quick-fix. We wanted to come to an agreement about a way for Acquisitions staff to help out with the Serials Solutions processing on a long-term, ongoing basis. We did not see this as a short-term help out when things are tough and walk away. It was believed that working on the Serials Solutions processing would help staff learn about e-resources, help get the work done, build their knowledge and confidence for the process of checking-on that we will be moving toward in the near future.

There are occasions when changes happen suddenly and we do not have a great deal of time to plan and implement new policies. Those types of changes are disruptive and unsettling to staff. However, there are changes we can anticipate and plan for. Having the luxury of time, we created a plan to implement a very drastic change in stages.

DMPB and Cataloging had been working on e-journals for several years and as a result there were well developed written procedures available for staff. There was also an established training program. It was necessary to develop an orientation program to introduce the e-journals work to the Acquisitions Services staff. Having a visual presentation and demonstration changes the plan from an abstract concept into a tangible one. It is important that staff understand what it is that they will be accomplishing and how it fits into the overall organization. The training is done on a one-on-one basis. The training program continues until the trainer is certain that the trainee is confident in his/her abilities to perform the tasks and feels comfortable working on their own. We customized the training program to fit Acquisitions Services' interest in having the training broken down into stages to help ease the transition into e-journals work.

Challenges to implementing change

The challenges to implementing this cross-departmental project have been primarily about working outside of personal and departmental boundaries. This process requires staff to rethink their work responsibilities, taking on new tasks, and letting go of others. Opportunities and lines for communication have been created by the formation of different working groups. Some groups, such as SSG, have been created to help manage change and others to provide for feedback from the staff doing the work. It is important to create an environment that is open to discussion but to bear in mind that people will not always tell you what they are really thinking until they are ready to.

We shared short PowerPoint presentations at Acquisitions Services Department meetings on important trends and developments in publishing and users expectations that affect all libraries. Telling people about the changes that are coming is important to alleviating their fears about the future. One member of the Acquisitions Services Department gave a presentation on what is happening to print, and another member in the department provided an overview of the basics of e-journal acquisition and management. We wanted to be sure that everyone learned some key concepts, so that they had a strong foundation to attach the details about the specific work tasks. We wanted to be sure that everyone learned the proper terminology and why the work on the URLs is so important to accessing e-resources. The presentations were well received and helped staff learn about each other's work too. We reinforced the fact that although it is true that an e-journal subscription does not provide any physical items to verify the continuity of regular service, our expertise is needed to document our orders and pay for all of the e-resources.

Preparing for feedback

Be prepared for questions and the questions may not always come to you. Staff are going to reach out to their peers to find out what they are learning and how their work is changing. Even if you have been involved with the planning and policy decisions about how you are going to manage e-journals, all of the staff have not been immersed in it and you need to share the details when you get the questions.

How you react to questions is important. Remember that the information may not be new to you, but it is new to other people.

When people are concerned about the changes to their job, they may feel that it is only happening to them and that they are alone. This is why it is good to have people work together or to hear about the plans and trends together, so they are not isolated and can discuss the information presented with their peers.

Provide the information over time, at different events, and in new ways. For example, we have a working group that focuses on planning and managing the Serials Solutions data. What Serials Solutions is and how we use it in our library remains a mystery to many people, so we are going to be hosting a brown bag lunch, three times on three separate days, so everyone can attend. At the lunch, one person will be providing an overview; one will be explaining the link resolver and a third will be sharing how we use information from Serials Solutions to keep our OPAC records up to date.

When communicating the plan we anticipated having to explain why it needed to happen. The staff were given a detailed explanation of some key reasons for the change. To begin with, our complete shelf list is now the online cataloging and although it takes place in the cataloging module the work is not cataloging journals. They can look at it as a transition from recording information on print cards to electronic records. It's important to get the e-journals in the online catalog because our patrons are expecting it. This is not a one-time project because e-journals and packages are not static. There are constantly changes that need to be made to the records. E-journals require more maintenance resulting in more work than can be accomplished by those assigned to journals in the print environment.

Explain the benefits of these changes. Remind staff that it's not just happening to a few staff but that all our jobs are changing. We are all being asked to learn new skills and take on more complex responsibilities. Remind them that they are seeing their current responsibilities shrink as we purchase less print materials. This is an opportunity to revitalize their jobs. E-journals may change their format but will not be going away. Challenging and time-consuming as e-journals are, they greatly improve our ability to provide comprehensive and immediate access to resources to our patrons. At the same time, we are challenging staff to think of best practices for all our areas of responsibilities not just e-journals.

It is important to give staff what they want and need to be highly productive. We need to provide timely communication, share whatever information you can with them, set clear goals for them, talk with them about the issues that the library is facing. Besides talking it is important to make time to listen to their concerns and ideas, provide opportunities to have open and frank discussions, respond to their questions even if you don't have all the answers. Take their questions to the administration for answers. Let staff know they can speak directly with administrators and provide those opportunities.

Question posed to the group: How do you get staff on board? There was some brief general discussion about the challenges and complexity of getting staff involved in managing e-resources.

Challenges to implementing the plan

In our division, whenever there is a vacancy, we are required to think about the needs of the department and the division. We are not permitted to simply fill the position as it existed. Vacancies have provided opportunities for us to create new jobs and to address our new priorities.

We created a list of skills that were needed to process the Serials Solutions data. Our immediate future plans are to have the departments meet to discuss how the responsibilities would be shared, which aspects would be assigned to staff, when to alter performance programs and what expectations needed to be met.

At one of our team meetings called Grumble & Cheer sessions the conversation turned into a discussion about selecting OCLC electronic journal records to export into our ILS and what types of editing would be needed to enhance the records. After the meeting, staff starting speaking among themselves stating that they were confused about how to judge the records and felt the new requirements would slow them down. After speaking with staff and the Cataloging Services Team Leader, it became apparent that the decision to have all staff working

at the same level of responsibility was not possible at this time. Staff would need more training, more advanced skills and more experience to be able to work with records.

Celebrate success along the way

There is a great deal of complex work that needs to be done to electronic journals into our online catalog. It was important for us to celebrate stages of accomplishment to keep us on track and to remind staff that their work is appreciated. It is also important to meet with staff on a regular basis to keep communication flowing and to reinforce that we are all part of a team. Thanks you do not need to be large or monetary. They can be as simple as donuts, lunch or a thank you card for work well done. Our division is currently implementing an appreciation program to give our staff regular rewards and tokens of appreciation. We are also creating bookmarks, customized pencils, & thank you cards to be left out in a central area for staff to give to their peers to acknowledge a job well done.

Question posed to the group: We would like to finish by asking do you have any tips or tricks to share? *The presenters ran out of time, but some ideas were shared during earlier portions of the presentation and in informal discussions following the session.*